



# The City of College Station, Texas


*Embracing the Past, Exploring the Future.*

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## Memorandum

**TO:** Mayor Lynn McIlhaney  
City Council

**THROUGH:** Tom Brymer, City Manager 

**FROM:** Ken Fogle, Transportation Planner

**DATE:** January 15, 2002

**RE:** TxDOT Frontage Road Policy

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) is in the process of making significant changes to its policy on frontage roads. The purpose of this memorandum is to summarize the proposed policy changes, explain how it could affect existing and future roadway projects in College Station, and recommend the position that the City of College Station should take on this policy change.

### Proposed Policy Changes

Up until June 28, 2001 it was the common policy for TxDOT to build frontage roads. However, under the new policy, when planning a new location freeway or relief route, TxDOT will start with the premise that frontage roads will not be built. TxDOT will then evaluate if frontage roads should be built in certain locations to provide local access, and what impact this access would have on safety and mobility.

Regulating access to a highway is termed "access control." Access control is achieved by limiting access rights to and from properties adjacent to the highway. In Texas, access control of freeways is accomplished through the purchase of access rights or the provision of frontage roads. Frontage roads have long been Texas' preferred solution for controlling access along freeways.

Access control is important in the development of freeways. A freeway is defined as a main highway with full control of access. Full control of access gives preference to through traffic by providing limited access connections using ramps at only selected public roads (such as collectors and arterials) and by prohibiting at-grade or direct private driveway connections.

The proposed rules state that for new location freeways and relief routes, TxDOT no longer intends to construct frontage roads unless necessary and justified. However, TxDOT may approve frontage roads under the following circumstances:

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- to improve safety and efficiency of the operations of a state highway corridor
- to resolve landlocked conditions on certain remaining parcels to restore circulation of local traffic from severed streets
- if the cost to purchase access rights exceeds the cost of constructing the frontage road
- if it is determined to be in the best interest of the state.

Projects currently being developed may be affected by the new rules and will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Evaluation will include a review of prior commitments or development work based on the previous frontage road policy.

Finally, it appears that TxDOT will be more strict with granting access on existing frontage roads.

### **Potential Affects to College Station Roadways**

#### *State Highway 40*

This project, which is projected to begin in the summer of 2003, will initially be constructed as a four-lane divided (non-access controlled) highway. Because it is a non-access controlled facility, we do not believe that it will be affected by the new policy. If at some point the demand of the roadway exceeds the capacity, TxDOT would consider constructing an access controlled freeway within the median. At that point, the frontage road policy could affect SH40 by not allowing access to the frontage roads from adjacent properties that do not meet the new criteria.

Under the proposed policy, any properties that have access to SH40 before the freeway is constructed would have access to the frontage road when the freeway is opened. Properties that do not have access to SH40 before the freeway is constructed would have to be granted access by the Texas Transportation Commission (TTC). They would be granted access if the applicant can show that TxDOT does not own access rights to their property and the addition of the driveway would not be detrimental to the safety or operations of the roadway facility. Access would be considered on a case-by-case basis by the TTC.

Most likely, any property that is landlocked would be granted access, but those properties on the corner that have access to a cross street may not be granted access.

#### *State Highway 6 (between College Station and Navasota)*

Although this section of roadway is currently outside of our city limits, it does lie within our ETJ. This roadway has administrative approval from TxDOT to have frontage roads when it is re-constructed to a freeway. As with SH40, properties with access to SH6 before the freeway section is built would have access to the new frontage roads. Those properties without access would have to go to the TTC and show that TxDOT does not own access rights and that the addition of any driveways would not be detrimental to safety or operations of the facility. The current policy would not allow access.

*State Highway 6 (through College Station)*

As we understand the current policy, all properties that do not have access when the draft rules are adopted would have to go before the TTC to have access granted. As described earlier, the applicant would have to show that TxDOT does not own access rights and that the addition of the street or driveway would not be detrimental to safety or operations of the TxDOT access controlled facility. Access would most likely be granted to landlocked parcels, but corner properties that have access to another street or roadway would be denied.

**Recommendations**

From College Station's perspective, while the new frontage road policy may make sense for new highway development in undeveloped areas, in existing urbanized areas such as Bryan and College Station, the policy and proposed rules could have significant negative impacts on future economic development and increased costs for right of way acquisition and highway construction. Although the Bryan TxDOT District representatives do not think the policy will have a significant impact on the City of College Station because all of the existing and planned freeways are shown to have frontage roads, until the proposed rules are finalized there is concern. There are a few recommendations to improve the policy from the City of College Station perspective. These include:

- Allow the local Districts to have administrative approval to allow access to frontage roads where TxDOT does not own access rights. This would speed up the development process by not requiring every case to go before the TTC.
- Allow corner properties on the frontage road (with access to another roadway) to have access to the frontage road. This would be consistent with existing development along the corridor, therefore avoiding "economic discrimination" situations.
- Make a distinction between right-of-way (ROW) costs and access rights. Currently, the majority of TxDOT projects must have a local match to help pay for ROW costs. If access rights and ROW costs are not separated, the cost of this local match could escalate significantly.
- We would like to echo TEX-21's comments that state an economic impact study should be conducted before the adoption of the proposed rules. This study should include input from local governments and other involved entities to better define the issues that need to be addressed and adequately considered in determining the advisability of the proposed changes to TxDOT's frontage road policy.